

Lancashire Livestock Farming during the Great Depression

By T. W. FLETCHER

THE phrase 'Great Depression' fairly describes the usual view taken of the condition of agriculture during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The ruin of her farmers was the price paid by Britain for the benefits she obtained, and conferred, as the great free trading nation of the world. Such is the usual verdict.¹ Of course depression did not press equally heavily on all farmers. According to Clapham, "north of the Humber . . . there was not so much wreckage as further south;" Lancashire was in the "half-light" and Cheshire, long famous for its dairies, "suffered less than any county."² But this was somehow marginal; depression was universal; it was merely that some luckier areas suffered less than the majority.

This paper explores the impact of the Great Depression upon the livestock farmers of Lancashire, the home of the cotton industry, of Cobden, Bright, and Free Trade, and, perhaps less widely appreciated, one of England's leading agricultural counties. It ranked sixth among English counties in area of agricultural land (c. 1890), and at least as high in terms of gross output per 100 acres. Like its neighbours, Cheshire, Derbyshire, the West Riding, Westmorland, and Cumberland, Lancashire was predominantly a livestock district, but unlike them, it contained within its borders an area of extremely intensive arable farming concentrated on the sands and mosses of the south-west. So different was, and is, this arable culture from the livestock farming of the north-west that it has been excluded from this study. As an example of pure arable farming that weathered the depression unchanged it merits separate treatment.³

LANCASHIRE FARMING

South of the Ribble and east of the arable plain, Triassic sandstones give

¹ The standard work is R. E. Prothero (Lord Ernle), *English Farming Past and Present*, 4th ed., 1927, ch. xviii, 'Adversity'; typical of the general historian is R. C. K. Ensor, *England 1870-1914*, 1936, p. 115: "British agriculture . . . was thrown overboard in the storm like an unwanted cargo" (eighteen-seventies); and p. 284: "Agriculture was ruined a second time over" (eighteen-nineties).

² J. H. Clapham, *An Economic History of Modern Britain*, 1951 ed., III, pp. 80, 81.

³ Contemporary descriptions may be found in *Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society*, xxxviii, 1877, pp. 462-526; XLVI, 1885, pp. 547-90; XLVII, 1886, pp. 120-71.

way to the coal measures and gritstones of the east Lancashire Pennines where the towns and villages of the cotton trade are strung along the valley bottoms, and in their interstices and on the hillsides are squeezed the small grass farms of the east Lancashire cowkeepers, men specializing in the retail sale of milk to the customers at their farm gates.

Agricultural writers of the nineteenth century say little of east Lancashire.¹ The best brief description is Rothwell's of 1850. "The district . . . is principally occupied as small dairy farms, there being a great demand for milk and butter; and not much adapted, from the nature of its soil and climate, for arable cultivation."² The system had not changed at the end of the century; the agent of an estate in the Blackburn-Oswaldtwistle area described his tenancies in 1895 as "all milk and butter farms." "They [the farmers] barter the products themselves in the large, adjoining towns; they retail it as you will understand."³

Although arable farming was only to be found in the south-west, milk production south of the Ribble was not confined to east Lancashire. Every town was supplied by producer-retailers on its outskirts whose methods were similar to but less intensive and more flexible than those of the east Lancashire men in that some crops were grown, to be sold when relative prices were favourable but otherwise fed to their cows. Such mixed farming was common in the Leigh-Wigan-Bolton-Chorley belt of country between the hills and the arable plain proper.

Lancashire, north of the Ribble, was a "purely agricultural district."⁴ The Fylde plain between the gritstone hills of Bowland on the Yorkshire border to the east and the coast to the west had been the county's granary in the eighteenth century but by 1870 was an important dairying district and, like Cheshire, specialized in cheese production.⁵ Milking stock were reared and

¹ For example, J. Holt, *General View of the Agriculture of the County of Lancashire*, 1795, p. 210: "Capital, labour, ingenuity and attention are in this county diverted from agriculture;" G. Beesley, *A Report on the State of Agriculture in Lancashire . . .*, Preston, 1849, p. 7: "Occupiers of land in this district can scarcely be considered farmers;" W. J. Garnett, *Prize Report of the Farming of Lancashire*, Preston, 1849, p. 8: "Altogether a coal district" with "not much to interest a farmer."

² W. Rothwell, *Report of the Agriculture of the County of Lancaster*, 1850, p. 20.

³ *Royal Commission on Agricultural Distress, 1894-97*, Q. 40,649-50 (J. Howson); the Alphabetical Digest (C. 8146 of 1896) enables individual witnesses to be traced to their appropriate volume.

⁴ Garnett, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

⁵ W. Smith, 'Agrarian Evolution since the Eighteenth Century', *Brit. Assoc. Report*, Blackpool, 1936, Appendix, p. 44; *Royal Commission on the Depressed Condition of the Agricultural Interest, 1880-82*, C. 3375-IV (Coleman's Report), p. 40; J. P. Sheldon, *The Future of British Agriculture*, 1893, p. 114.

dry cows fattened for the butcher. It was also famous as a horse-breeding centre, well situated for supplying the industrial towns to the south.¹

North of Lancaster stretches a narrow coastal strip, partly of limestone, where oats, roots, and seeds were grown for consumption on the farm by sheep and cattle on a system similar to the Scottish. Cattle were mainly of the dairy type, though at Holker, north of the sands, the duke of Devonshire maintained a celebrated herd of beef shorthorns. But, as Beesley had noted long before, "pedigree, shorthorned stock . . . are confined to gentlemen, or amateur farmers;"² 'Booth's shorthorns were too beefy; in Lancashire milk was demanded. The extraordinary growth of Barrow-in-Furness during the last third of the nineteenth century would yet further concentrate interest on the dairy rather than the beef animal. In the hills of Bowland and Furness, sheep and cattle rearing was universal. Butter was made on most farms, and with the increasing demand for milk cows, the by-products were used to rear dairy stock rather than children. Lamb, mutton, butter, and dairy heifers constituted the main output of these farms.³

Farms generally were small in Lancashire. The average size of 'holding' over 5 acres of crops and grass in 1875 was 40 acres compared with an average for England of 80 acres. In east Lancashire the comparable figure was 30. Only 8 per cent of all holdings over 5 acres were larger than 100 acres although accounting for more than 30 per cent of the total agricultural acreage of the county. Associated with the small size of farm was the importance of family labour. According to the 1871 Census the proportion of farmers and farmers' relatives to farm workers was 43 : 57, which was not very different from that of twenty years earlier (41 : 59) when Danson and Welton discovered to their surprise that south Lancashire was more densely populated with agriculturalists than any of the 'agricultural' counties.⁴ Because of the relatively large contribution to the total labour force made by farmers themselves, the money cost of labour was a less important farm expense in Lancashire than on the larger farms of the arable east, even though pastoral

¹ *Preston Guardian* (hereafter *P.G.*), I. 4. 1885: article on the development of shire breeding in Lancashire; *R.C.* 1880-82, Q. 67,733-4 (J. Clay).

² Beesley, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

³ Information from the Kelsall family's diaries and notebooks relating to the hills of the Lancaster area which have been kindly lent to the writer by Mr W. Kelsall of Quernmore.

⁴ T. A. Danson and J. T. Welton, 'On the Population of Lancashire and Cheshire, 1801-1851', *Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, XII, 1859, p. 63: "No facts are here before us which would justify an attempt to indicate the circumstances under which this ratio of agricultural population has been obtained, in the very heart of our district, usually regarded as pre-eminently, if not exclusively, favourable to manufacture and commerce. But the fact must be noticed as one of the most remarkable of those yet divulged by this enquiry."

settlement and industrial development had brought high farm wages. Wilson Fox's wage indices show that in 1867-71 average wages in the northern counties were 14s. 9d. a week compared with 11s. 11½d. in England and Wales and 11s. 4¾d. in the eastern counties.¹ Lancashire wages, particularly south of the Ribble, were frequently higher than Wilson Fox's average for the northern counties.²

The pattern of Lancashire's farm output is shown by the Agricultural Returns first collected in 1866.

TABLE I
CROPS AND STOCK PER 100 ACRES OF CROPS AND GRASS

Average of 1870, 1874, 1875 ³	CROP ACREAGES				LIVESTOCK NUMBERS			
	Arable	Corn	Oats	Potatoes	Cattle	Milk Cows	Sheep	Pigs
England	57	32	6	1	17	7	81	8
Lancashire	31	14	7	4	30	16	43	5
East Lancashire	5	2	1	—	37	22	46	4
North Lancashire	27	13	7	2	32	15	61	5

Compared with England on the eve of the depression, Lancashire possessed more permanent grass, and a greater proportion of its corn acreage was devoted to oats for feed. The county was relatively densely stocked with cattle and particularly so with milking stock, but there were relatively fewer sheep and pigs. County totals, like England's, conceal fundamental regional differences. Lancashire's 31 per cent of arable was an average of extremes, of 5 per cent in east Lancashire and of 60 per cent in the arable south-west; north of the Ribble about a quarter of the agricultural acreage was under the plough.

The leading products of Lancashire's livestock farms were milk, sold retail and wholesale, butter, cheese, and mutton and lamb. Poultry were kept in increasing numbers, but information is scanty for the nineteenth century. Most of the beef production in the county was cow beef, a by-product of dairying; more important was the rearing of milking stock, mainly by

¹ 'Agricultural Wages in England and Wales During the Last 50 Years', *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, LXIV, 1903.

² Wages of labourers on the Park farm of the Hesketh estate ranged up to 16s. (County Record Office, DD He/62/31, 32, 33, 1867-71); cowmen near Manchester were paid 18s. (*Manchester Guardian*, 9. 2. 1872).

³ The years 1870, 1874, and 1875 (the intervening years are unavailable) were chosen to avoid using the earlier, more unreliable, years; data were abstracted from the original parish and 'collection' summaries in the possession of the Ministry of Agriculture.

hill farmers north of the Ribble whose fortunes during the Great Depression were thus linked with those of the milk sellers of the Fylde and south Lancashire.

Among farmers' expenses other than labour, feed and rent predominated. Milk producers in the county had long been familiar with purchased feeding-stuffs, and the plentiful supply of brewers' wastes and the accessibility of imports at Liverpool encouraged a growing dependence on purchased feed by grassland farmers wishing to produce winter milk. The price movements of this crucial purchase during the Great Depression are of primary concern. Rent, as befits its many-sided character, is treated separately.

DEMAND

The population of Lancashire increased by some 50 per cent between 1867-71 and 1894-8; other things equal, demand for food would increase pro rata. But other things were not equal. Whatever form the Great Depression took, it was not a period of depression for the working classes, by comparison with whom the inhabitants of Lombard Street were insignificant as consumers of food. Earnings in the Lancashire cotton trade rose by some 25 per cent between 1867-71 and 1894-8¹ at a time when retail prices fell by about 26 per cent.² Per capita real income thus increased by some two-thirds, an annual rate of growth appreciably greater than during the 'good years' of 1850-70. Associated with rising income was the growing preference for protein rather than starch, for livestock products rather than cereals and potatoes. The oatmeal, coarse bread, cheese, and fat bacon of the farm labourer no longer sufficed for the more delicate appetites of the less robust cotton workers. Tea with milk, white bread and butter, meat, and eggs were their favourite dishes.³

Most vital to the Lancashire farmer because of its immunity from foreign competition was the demand for milk. On the conservative assumption that per capita intake of liquid milk in the county increased by a quarter between

¹ G. H. Wood, *The History of Wages in the Cotton Trade during the Past Hundred Years*, 1910, p. 128.

² W. T. Layton, *An Introduction to the Study of Prices*, 1912, p. 150.

³ See *P.G.* 28. 4. 1894: of the "operative classes in our large towns"—"their fondness for eggs, tea and other 'luxuries' having taken the place of their liking for the plain and wholesome tuber." Lancashire budgets collected by G. von Schulze-Gaevernitz in 1891 illustrate the prominent place of dairy products and meat in the diet of cotton operatives. The average of five detailed family weekly budgets shows 6s. 4d. spent on bread, flour, cereals, and potatoes, 9s. 5d. on milk, butter, eggs, and cheese, and 6s. 8d. on beef, mutton, pork, bacon, and ham.—*The Cotton Trade in England and on the Continent*, 1895, trans. O. S. Hall, pp. 178 ff.; see also W. E. Bear, 'The Food Supply of Manchester', *J.R.A.S.*, LVIII, 1897, p. 511.

1867-71 and 1894-8 (see Appendix A), total demand would rise by 88 per cent. Depending on quality and price relative to the imported product, the demand for lamb, eggs, and butter may well have risen to a similar, if not greater, extent. Lancashire farmers were keenly aware, as they had been for generations, that their prosperity was linked with that of trade and industry as reflected in consumer demand rather than with the protectionist policies of the 'agricultural interest' who seemed mainly concerned with the effects of weather and imports on the home wheat crop.¹

SUPPLIES AND PRICES

By contrast with demand, more specific information about farm supply is available as a result of the decision to collect agricultural statistics in 1866. In view of acreage uncertainties due to the declining use of local measures such as the Lancashire and Cheshire customary acres during the Great Depression, Graph A shows simply the numbers of the various classes of livestock in Lancashire between 1867 and 1900. Table II gives figures for the 'nineties comparable to those shown in Table I for the eighteen-seventies. Assuming that the increase in area of agricultural land from 748 to 823 thousand acres resulted from the displacement of customary measure by the statute acre,² it is clear that little change occurred in Lancashire farming during the last thirty years of the nineteenth century other than an intensifying of existing systems.

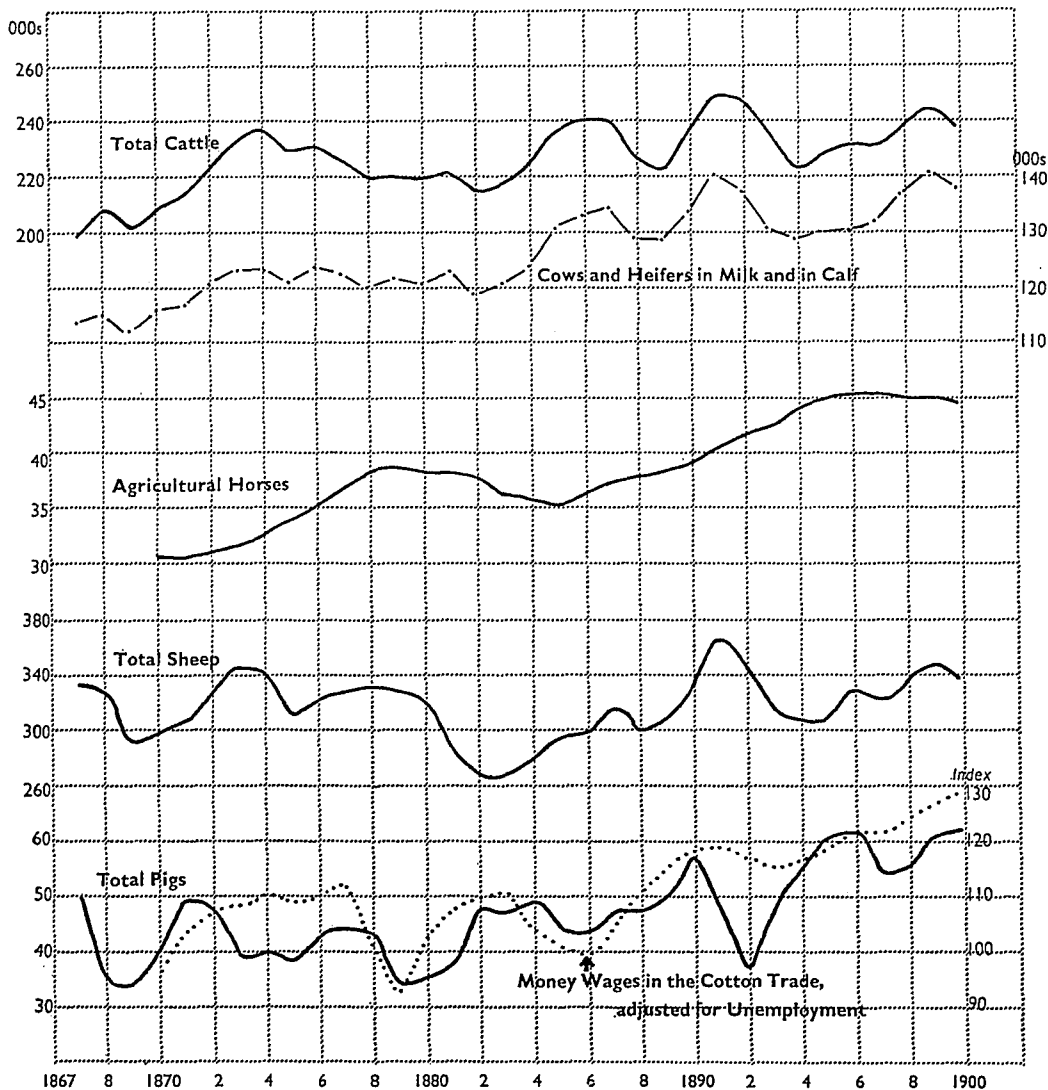
TABLE II
CROPS AND STOCK PER 100 ACRES OF CROPS AND GRASS

Average of 1894-8 inc.	CROP ACREAGES				LIVESTOCK NUMBERS				
	Arable	Corn	Oats	Potatoes	Cattle	Milk Cows	Sheep	Pigs	
England	47	23	8	1	18	8	64	9	
Lancashire	31	13	10	5	31	18	44	8	
East Lancashire	2	1	1	—	39	27	38	8	
North Lancashire	23	10	7	3	37	19	70	8	

¹ For example, a Brindle producer-retailer complained that "since business became bad at Gregson Lane Mill things have not been half so good for the farmers in the district" (*P.G.* 20. 4. 1895); cf. the Burnley milk-producer of fifty years earlier who was converted to a "corn-law repealer" by the discovery that the "closing of a mill in his neighbourhood suddenly deprived him of all his best customers."—W. Cooke Taylor, *Tour of the Manufacturing Districts*, 1842, p. 87.

² The most common customary measures used in Lancashire were of 2.1 and 1.6 statute acres; see E. H. Smith, 'Lancashire Long Measure', *Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, cx, 1958, pp. 1-14.

A. LIVESTOCK 1867-1900



(i) *Dairy Produce.* The total number of cattle rose from 226 thousand in 1870, 1874, and 1875, to 230 thousand in 1894-8, an increase of some 2 per cent; the number of cows and heifers in milk and in calf increased by 10 per cent.¹ This concentration on the productive milk cow was most noticeable in east Lancashire, where, with total cattle numbers rising no faster than in the county as a whole, cows and heifers increased by some 20 per cent. Nevertheless, the number of milk cows per 1,000 of the population of Lancashire,

¹ The growth of cattle numbers in north and east Lancashire was partly offset by a decline in the arable south-west of the county.

which in 1871-5 was 42, fell to 32 in 1894-8. Lancashire's milk supply could thus only be maintained by increasing yield per cow, by increasing the output of liquid milk at the expense of butter- and cheese-making, or by importing milk into the county.

If the yield per cow in Lancashire is assumed to have been 350 gallons per annum in 1870 and to have increased by 20 per cent to 420 in 1894-8, if per capita consumption is taken as $\frac{1}{4}$ pint a day rising by 25 per cent, and if 30 per cent of total milk production was sold in the form of butter and cheese in 1870 with absolute output remaining constant thereafter, an overall picture emerges which is shown in Table III.¹ Considerable latitude may be allowed in the assumptions without affecting the general position.

TABLE III

Lancashire— million gallons	(i) Milk Production	(ii) Butter and Cheese	(iii) Milk Sales (i—ii)	(iv) Liquid Consumption	(v) Import (iv—iii)
Average of 1870-1	32.7	9.7	23.0	32.8	9.8
Average of 1894-8 inc.	47.1	9.7	37.4	61.2	23.8

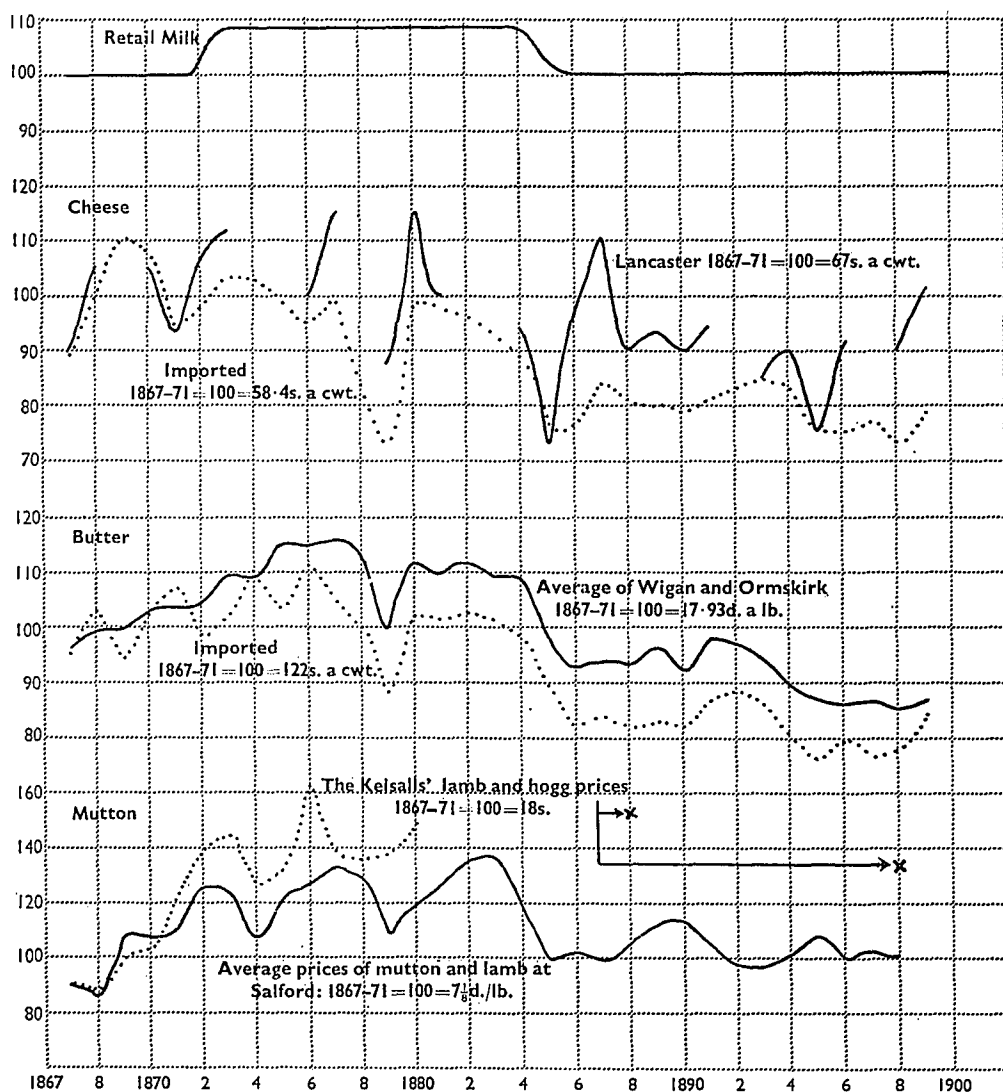
The import of milk into Lancashire was not easy: little was produced in the hills to the north and north-east, while over the Pennines to the east the industrial West Riding was barely self-sufficient. To the south the famous dairying county of Cheshire supplied the bulk of Lancashire's needs. The demands of other concentrations of consumers, however, notably the Great Wen itself, facilitated by the railway companies' use of differential rates to encourage the long haul, were, by the eighteen-seventies, stretching into Staffordshire, Derbyshire, and many parts of Cheshire.²

Local producers had thus every incentive to increase their output of liquid milk, and most butter- and cheese-makers in Lancashire, like those of Cheshire, were within competitive range of the large liquid markets of Manchester and Liverpool at a time when their dairy produce was subjected to growing import competition. But, as may be seen from Graph B, Lancashire farm cheese and butter did not fall in price to the same extent as imports; the inflexibility of supply, given the attraction of the liquid market, and the

¹ For a discussion of these estimates see Appendix A.

² See E. A. Pratt, *The Transition in Agriculture*, 1906, pp. 18-23; R.C. 1880-82, Q. 5,777-800, Q. 30,491; R.C. 1894-97, Q. 35,345-6; *Report from the Select Committee on Railways*, H.C. 374 of 1881, Q. 8,029; *Agricultural Gazette*, 11. 10. 1880.

B. PRICE INDICES



growing consumer preference for better quality, account for the relative rise in price of the superior Lancashire grades. Evidence of change in the quantity of butter and cheese made on Lancashire farms is contradictory. Farmers are reported to have abandoned cheese-making for the more lucrative sale of liquid milk; they are also said to have improved and increased their output of Lancashire cheese, which did not reach Manchester market until the early eighteen-nineties. It was then mostly supplied from Preston, where in response to demand from urban south Lancashire the cheese market was at this

time growing rapidly and supplanting that of Lancaster.¹ Local farm butter was unknown in the Manchester market; it was mainly sold retail in the producing areas, either by producer-retailers to their milk customers—the usual method of disposing of surplus milk—in the local market, or by private contract to customers who preferred fresh farm produce and were prepared to pay a higher price for it.² Those hill farmers of north Lancashire who were unable or unwilling to sell liquid milk continued to produce butter for local sale.³

Price movements in Lancashire seem to have been as follows. The price of butter rose, as did liquid milk, during the eighteen-sixties and seventies and did not significantly break until 1878. The fall of 1879 was acute but of short duration: by 1880 butter and cheese prices seemed normal enough. But with the trade depression of 1883–6 prices fell, touching bottom in 1886 and bringing down both wholesale and retail milk prices. Recovery was hesitant and partial, and the break of 1890–3 in the upward surge of real wages checked demand and some prices gave way again after 1892.⁴ Demand picked up in 1894, and the Lancashire milk-cow population, which had fallen steeply from a suspiciously prominent peak in 1891, resumed its increase.⁵ The price of imported butter and cheese, like that of meat and eggs, fell sharply after 1893 to a minimum in 1897–8 and impressively larger quantities were imported. While milk prices held, local butter and all but top-quality cheese prices continued to sag until import prices recovered in 1898.

The most significant feature was the stability of the retail milk price and the limited movement of the wholesale price. As milk production was the most important single activity of Lancashire farmers, and as approximately

¹ *R.C.* 1894–97, Q. 11,320 (A. Wilson Fox); cf. *M.G.* 29. 3. 1883: "It is a notorious fact that the demand for milk in our largest cities is increasing at a rapid rate, so much so that many who have made cheese and more who have been making butter have given up both for milk selling." *P.G.* 12. 10. 1895; Bear, *loc. cit.*, p. 513; *P.G.* 1. 12. 1894: cheese fairs were instituted at Preston in 1879; in 1881 the total pitch was 769 cheeses, in 1893 17,618, and in 1894 18,622 cheeses.

² *R.C.* 1894–97, Q. 40,650 (J. Howson), Q. 12,593 (T. Worthington); *P.G.* 18. 4. 1891, 24. 1. 1891; Graham, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

³ Kelsall Diaries; but even in Furness whole milk selling was common, with that surplus to market requirement being made into butter, the skim milk "finding a ready sale" (*P.G.* 22. 9. 1881).

⁴ This is true of market butter but not of better quality cheese which held its price until 1895, when it suffered from a 'record' supply due to the hot summer (*M.G.* 3. 10. 1895, *P.G.* 18. 4. 1896), a diminishing demand as a result of the cold spring (*R.C.* 1894–97, Q. 62,411), and the cheapness of frozen mutton (*ibid.*).

⁵ "Suspicious" because there is nothing in the state of trade or the movement of prices in 1888–91 to account for the steep fall in cow numbers after 1891. A possible explanation put forward at the time is that high meat prices led to abnormal slaughterings: certainly dairy stock were highly priced and in short supply in 1893–4 (*P.G.* 7. 10. 1893, 10. 11. 1894).

three-quarters of the total dairy output took the form of liquid milk, the maintenance of the milk price during a period of generally falling prices was clearly a powerful factor in supporting farmers' incomes and encouraging expansion of output.

It seems that a fair degree of equilibrium existed between farmers' net returns from the sale of milk and the making of cheese or butter, except for poor quality cheese and, after 1885 possibly and after 1893 almost certainly, for butter sold in the local market.¹ In these circumstances the less efficient producers would be persuaded to improve the quality of their product, particularly in the case of cheese where relatively high returns might be achieved,² improve its marketing, more feasible in the case of butter,³ or enter the liquid market. A shift to liquid sales was also encouraged by a fall in rail transport costs which, between the eighteen-seventies and the eighteen-nineties, approximately halved within the area supplying Manchester.⁴

Normally butter was made on the farm all the year round, frequently from milk surplus to retail liquid requirements, whereas cheese-making was usually a seasonal occupation when the cows were out at grass. Thus price relationships varied seasonally, as they did in different parts of the county, and local opportunities offered scope to the enterprising to market their milk in its most profitable form. Peter Blundell, the well-known Fylde farmer and horsebreeder, made cheese all the year round, whereas some of his neighbours confined their cheese-making to spring and autumn; in the height of the summer they sold liquid milk into the spreading seaside resorts.⁵ Others combined cheese with winter butter or winter milk; all depended upon circumstance. Intermittent developments of this nature during the Great Depression, the fruit of innumerable decisions by thousands of small farmers, produced a remarkable increase in the supplies of liquid milk and improved the quality of farm butter and cheese.⁶ The existence of local preferences for farm produce should warn the unwary against the use of import prices to measure farmers' receipts.

¹ Cf. Ruth Cohen, *A History of Milk Prices*, pp. 21 et seq.

² For example, even in the eighteen-nineties 70s. a cwt was obtained at Preston in the spring (*M.G.* 29. 3. 1893, 29. 3. 1894, 27. 3. 1895).

³ For the advantages of marketing butter privately, see *P.G.* 24. 1. 1891, 18. 4. 1891, and *R.C.* 1894-97, Q. 21,761, 35,331-48.

⁴ *Manchester Courier*, 28. 3. 1872; *Report from the S.C. on Railways*, 1881, Q. 8021, 8029; *Report on Railway Rates and Charges Provisional Order Bills*, 1891, Q. 8499 and p. 946; Bear, *loc. cit.*, p. 508.

⁵ *P.G.* 20. 4. 1895, 13. 10. 1894.

⁶ Some help was given by both County Council and private landowners in the form of attempts to improve the quality of farm butter and cheese, mainly in the direction of standardization by the encouragement of scientific methods; see, e.g., *P.G.* 18. 4. 1891, 30. 4. 1892.

(ii) *Sheep*. The remaining livestock product of importance in Lancashire was mutton. The total sheep population of the county was 319 thousand in 1870, 1874-5; it fell steeply to a trough in 1882-3 from natural causes of weather or disease common throughout the country, and recovered by 1894-8 to some 4 per cent above its original level. Sheep numbers declined in east Lancashire owing to the growing industrial exploitation of these hills as quarries, reservoirs, and gathering-grounds, and to the competition of retail milk selling. Most of Lancashire's sheep were to be found north of the Ribble in the hills of Bowland and Furness, and here total numbers increased by over 20 per cent.

There was a fundamental difference in the type of sheep kept on arable and hill farms in the nineteenth century. The former were heavy, often long-woolled breeds, and their owners suffered from the extreme fall in wool prices and the import competition, particularly of frozen mutton after 1883, which lowered the price of their fat mutton. In contrast, wool was less important to the hill farmer; it was only of carpet quality, and even when it fetched a shilling a pound in the early 'seventies brought in but 3s. a ewe as against 25s. for her lamb. The lean horned hill ewe and her crosses bred the small lambs and lightweight mutton that were in growing demand and with which, during this period, the foreign supply was not directly competitive. It is significant that the ratio of lambs to total sheep in Lancashire increased by almost 10 per cent during the Great Depression, and the explanation of this shift from wether mutton to lamb production is to be found in the relative movement of their prices which reflected the impact of changes in consumer demand upon the supply situation. As with cheese, the better quality home produce was considered superior to the imported and priced accordingly. Newspaper reports of Salford market, the largest livestock market in the county, stress throughout the period the high demand for lamb and lightweight mutton.¹ Fat wether mutton, like the live and frozen imported, sold at well below the price of English and Scotch lamb.² The difference was particularly wide in 1895 when frozen imported mutton could be bought in London for 2d. a lb. at a time when first quality English lamb was fetching up to 11d. at Salford. The general position was that particularized by the market reporter in 1895: "Choice small sheep were scarce and in good de-

¹ For example, *M.G.* 8. 1871: "Choice lambs . . . were very scarce and much sought after;" *ibid.* 3. 10. 1894: "Good demand for choice lightweight sheep."

² For example, *M.G.* 8. 1871: "Foreign sheep were of such indifferent quality that they were almost unsaleable;" *ibid.* 4. 10. 1871: foreign sheep were a "drug on the market;" *ibid.* 3. 6. 1885: "inferior qualities sold slowly at a reduction;" *ibid.* 3. 6. 1896: "heavy and fat sheep not quotable."

mand at late full rates, but heavy and inferior sold slowly at lower [compared with the previous week] prices."¹ Mutton (including ewe) prices at Salford fell slightly from 7·2 to 7·1 pence a lb. between 1867-71 and 1894-8; lamb prices rose from 7·5 to 8·1d.

Lancashire sheep farmers would undoubtedly agree with the Yorkshireman who, quoting the price of "small mutton" as "well worth 8d. a lb." to the Royal Commission in November 1895, admitted "we have not been doing badly at all. Taking the depression during the last twenty years the sheep have held up wonderfully."² Following consumers' preference and increasing their rate of turnover in the process, sheep farmers abandoned the rearing of heavyweight, low-priced wethers in favour of an annual crop of lightweight, high-priced lambs.

(iii) *Poultry and Pigs*. The number of pigs in Lancashire increased by about a third during the Great Depression; the number of poultry also increased but no figures are available. Total imports of pigmeat into the U.K. more than doubled between 1871-5 and 1894-8, and prices of imported fresh pork and bacon fell by 8 per cent and 13 per cent respectively; no local quotations have been found. From 1867-71 import prices of eggs rose in the early 'seventies but gradually declined to about the original level by 1894-8; unlike import prices local prices at Stockport did not fall after 1886. The profit to be derived from poultry and their growing importance in Lancashire were frequently discussed.³ In that feed accounts for some 80 per cent of production costs, as with pigs, the steep fall in purchased feed prices during the Great Depression constituted a clear profit incentive for the farmer to increase his output, particularly of eggs, which, as the price indicates, were in high demand and, as today, were preferred fresh from the farm.⁴

The Yorkshireman's verdict was applicable to all the main output products of the Lancashire farmer during the Great Depression when considered in relation to the general course of prices. Even the price of his poorest cheese did not sink to the depths reached by the wheat price. The decline in world cereal prices certainly affected Lancashire livestock farmers, but most agreeably, as the note on feed prices indicates.

(iv) *Labour*. Lancashire Census data provide only a crude picture of variations within the agricultural population which in total fell from 51 to 40 thousand between 1871 and 1901. The changes recorded in the numbers of both farmers and their relatives are suspect, but whereas the decline in the number of farmers is exaggerated a spurious increase is shown in the number

¹ *M.G.* 2. 10. 1895; cf. *P.G.* 2. 1. 1892.

² *R.C.* 1894-97, Q. 61,014 (P. Norfolk).

³ For example, *J.R.A.S.*, 1877, p. 492; *P.G.* 11. 4. 1885, 2. 4. 1892, 15. 9. 1892, 20. 4. 1895.

⁴ See *R.C.* 1894-97, Q. 62,166-230, and *Final Report*, p. 254.

of relatives.¹ The total of farmers and relatives is perhaps not too inaccurate and its proportion to that of male farm workers rose slightly from 43 : 57 in 1871 to 47 : 53 in 1901. The number of farm workers in the county fell by 28 per cent during these years, from 29·4 to 21·1 thousand. Alternative employment was close at hand south of the Ribble, if less so to the north, and the exodus of labour from farms was facilitated by the gradual introduction of mowing machines, 'hay collectors', and other machinery to cope with the haytime peak of the grassland farmer's year. As always, farmers' sons and daughters were "flocking to the towns," bringing home in 1894 "from £2 to £3 10s. a week."²

Farm wages in the northern counties, already higher than elsewhere in 1867-71, were raised yet further during the Great Depression. In 1894-8 they stood at 17s. 4½d. a week, an increase of 18 per cent compared with average wages in England and Wales which had risen by only 12 per cent to 13s. 4½d.³ Wages throughout the country rose in the 'seventies but whereas in the north gains were consolidated in some areas a slipping back was evident. Almost all Wilson Fox's Lancashire evidence was collected from the Fylde where the weekly wages of a stockman were 17s.-18s. in both 1891 and 1901. South of the Ribble £1 a week was commonly quoted in the 'nineties.⁴ To the farm worker the period was one of slowly growing comfort. Like the cotton operative he benefited from the fall in retail prices, but increases in his cash income of 18 per cent compared unfavourably with the 25 per cent increase of an initially higher income enjoyed by his fellows in the factory: here was the continuing incentive to leave the farm.

With a decline of 28 per cent in the number of paid workers and an increase of some 18 per cent in average wages, the total wage bill paid by Lancashire farmers declined by 15 per cent during the Great Depression. Many Lancashire farmers employed no regular labour other than their families, and of those who did, almost all worked alongside their men. Their whole way of life contrasted vividly with that of the large tenant farmers of the corn-growing areas.

(v) *Feed*. On dairy farms feed was much the most important cash outlay. A Fylde farmer in 1885 spent £651 10s. 1d., or approximately £13 a cow, on

¹ Exaggerated by the exclusion of retired farmers after 1871; decennial numbers of farmers from 1861 to 1901 were, in thousands, 16·8, 16·0, 14·8, 13·5, 12·2; female relatives were included in 1901 in contrast to the preceding three Censuses; for a critical analysis of these figures see Lord Eversley, 'The Decline in Number of Agricultural Labourers in Great Britain', *J.R.S.S.*, LXX, 1907, pp. 267-319.

² *R.C. 1894-97*, Q. 14,274 (J. Barlow).

³ Wilson Fox, *op. cit.*, p. 332.

⁴ *R.C. 1894-97*, Q. 12,580 (T. Worthington): "19s. to £1"; Q. 27,290 (T. Mercer): "£1"; *P.G.* 20. 4. 1895: "20s."

feed for his cows, which numbered between 48 and 52; his rent and rates for 98 acres were £338 8s. 6½d.¹ On more intensive dairy farms expenditure on feed was relatively greater. Thomas Barlow of Rossendale in east Lancashire spent £400 a year on provender in the 'nineties for 31 milking cows, which again averaged some £13 a cow but at prices lower than those of the preceding decade. His farm was 44 acres and probably rented at about £90.² Such intensive stocking was not uncommon among the producer-retailers of east Lancashire:³ the hill farmers of the north were more self-sufficient.

The Royal Agricultural Society's judges remarked in 1877 on the "abundant supply of feeding stuffs in the great port of Liverpool,"⁴ where imports of maize increased from an average of 4·3 million cwt for the years 1867-71 to 13·1 million in 1894-8, and of oilcakes from 18·2 to 97·5 thousand tons. The fall in price was the factor mainly responsible for this increase in the quantity of feed purchased by farmers, which was in turn, apart from slow advances in breeding and management, the means whereby milk and livestock output was so signally and, it would seem, profitably expanded. In the case of the two important items maize and oilcakes, overseas trade figures for the U.K. show a fall in price of 45 per cent and 37 per cent respectively between 1867-71 and 1894-8, and it seems reasonable to suppose that the cost of feed to the Lancashire farmer fell by at least a third during this period.

With labour an overhead on the ubiquitous family farm, many dairy farmers on the plain both north and south of the Ribble continued to grow oats and other crops for livestock feed. In such circumstances the market price of his oats was not the farmer's chief concern; more apposite was the relationship between the oat price and the cost of a comparable feed. As the Wiltshire man explained to the Royal Commission in 1895, he had grown and sold oats at 24s. 6d. a quarter and purchased Russian barley for "13s. 9d. delivered."⁵ It is unlikely that such opportunities escaped the Lancashire man. Twenty years earlier south-west Lancashire arable farmers were purchasing maize at 6s. 6d. a cwt to feed their farm horses; their oats they sold for 8s. 9d.⁶ If the Lancashire farmer in search of profit dared deprive his horses of their oats, he would certainly experiment with the diet of the more accommodating cow as opportunity prompted. These considerations partly

¹ *J.R.A.S.*, XLVII, 1886, p. 146.

² *R.C. 1894-97*, Q. 14,280 (T. Barlow); the rent is estimated.

³ Stocking on the Thwaites's estate was equivalent to "one head for every 1 ac. 1 r. 35 p. of land."—*R.C. 1894-97*, Q. 40,661 (J. Howson).

⁴ *J.R.A.S.*, XXXVIII, 1877, p. 504.

⁵ *R.C. 1894-97*, Q. 15,821 (Sir G. Goldney).

⁶ *J.R.A.S.*, XXXVIII, 1877, p. 486.

explain the maintenance of the county's oat acreage during a period of falling oat prices, although more to the point in arable south-west Lancashire, where the bulk of the county's oats were grown, was the relationship between the prices of wheat and oats.

RENT

Rent is of peculiar interest. Net rent represents the income of the landowner; it may be thought of as the return on his investment. Gross rent is both a cost to the farmer and a measure of the demand for land and thus indirectly of the changing prospects in agriculture. Rent is somewhat insensitive in this last respect as landlords and their agents do not necessarily accept the highest bidder and the rent of a farm tenanted by the same family for decades is slow to change. Landlord-tenant relationships were important in Lancashire where the owner-occupier was a negligible figure. Owners farmed less than 10 per cent of Lancashire's agricultural land; the comparable figure for England was 20.¹ In east Lancashire, the most industrialized part of the county, the percentage was as low as 7.² The landowning families of Lancashire, with the Stanleys and the Molyneuxs at their head, were of ancient descent and clung tenaciously to their estates.³ Manufacturers who invested in land either purchased small properties within the county or, like Sir Robert Peel the elder, looked elsewhere.⁴

The lease and the covenant were rare, particularly south of the Ribble. The country-wide survey conducted by the *Mark Lane Express* in 1876 into the effects of the Agricultural Holdings Act of the previous year summarized the position in Lancashire;⁵ few leases were to be found other than on Crown property north of Lancaster; nor were they desired by the tenantry who, perhaps like Peter Blundell, had "no desire for either a lease or tenant right, regarding Lord Derby as the best landlord in England."⁶ If this sentiment be thought to represent a survival of 'feudal' instinct in rural north Lan-

¹ Estimates from *Agricultural Returns* 1890-8 inclusive.

² 'Collection' figures; complicated by the existence of Honour of Clitheroe copyholders whose unique tenure was, in practice, almost indistinguishable from freehold.

³ Of 24 estates in south Lancashire of over 3,000 acres in the eighteen-seventies 19 were in the hands of families who could trace their occupation back at least as far as the reign of Henry VIII; the remaining five were also ancient estates of inheritance.—J. Bateman, *The Great Landowners of Great Britain and Ireland*, 1879 ed.

⁴ For example, Mr Earnshaw, a cotton manufacturer of Bury, bought a small estate in the Fylde of "one farm or more" (*P.G.* 20. 10. 1894); another Bury manufacturer, "Squire" Mucklow, purchased 7,000 acres in Cornwall in the mid-nineteenth century (*P.G.* 29. 9. 1894).

⁵ W. E. Bear, *The Relations of Landlord and Tenant in England and Scotland*, 1876, Appendix, pp. 104-31, where the findings of the survey are usefully summarized.

⁶ *R.C. 1880-82*, Coleman's Report, p. 38.

cashire, at the other extreme was Thomas Worthington of Wigan who declared before a Royal Commission, "I have taken my farm like taking a house. When I have paid the rent I am master of the show."¹

In spite of what might appear to be a lamentable absence of security, Lancashire farmers were prepared to sink large amounts of tenant's capital into their farms.² They found that it paid to farm intensively even though under six months' notice to quit should the land be required for building.³ The tenant's security was rooted in "confidence in his landlord."⁴

The concomitant of the annual tenancy in Lancashire was the freedom from restriction. As early as 1876 every Lancashire farm mentioned in the report of the Prize Farm Competition was noted as being an "annual tenancy" with "no restrictions."⁵ This informality between landlord and tenant was partly due to the presence of manufacturers. The main economic incentive of many ancient families in retaining their south Lancashire estates in the nineteenth century was the prospect of mineral rights, coal royalties, ground rents, and the other 'casual profits' that industrial development and the growth of population brought to the landowner.

Dr H. A. Rhee's index of national farm rents rises from 100 in 1870-1 to a peak of 113 in 1877 and then slowly declines to 75 in 1899.⁶ Lancashire rents were higher throughout than Dr Rhee's average for the country and ranged between 30s. and 68s. per acre.⁷ Moreover no fall is apparent when 1870 is compared with the end of the century. Total 'agreed' rents on the Derby estates in Fylde and Bowland rose from £16,346 in 1884 to £20,212 in 1904 with arrears running at the rate of 14 and 15 per cent respectively. In view of the possibility of addition by piecemeal purchase, a contingency not without

¹ R.C. 1894-97, Q. 12,774 (T. Worthington).

² R.C. 1880-82, Q. 67,501 (J. Coleman): "Tenant's capital of £15-20 an acre . . . very much larger than ordinary capital;" *J.R.A.S.*, xxxix, 1886, p. 109: "the extraordinary development of land values at their own risk by yearly tenants."

³ *Ibid.*, Coleman's Report, p. 32; cf. *ibid.*, pp. 33-4: a Stretford tenant of Sir Humphrey de Trafford had "no special agreement as to tenant right and does not appear to want it. He said that if he knew that he was going to leave next year he could not afford to alter his management."

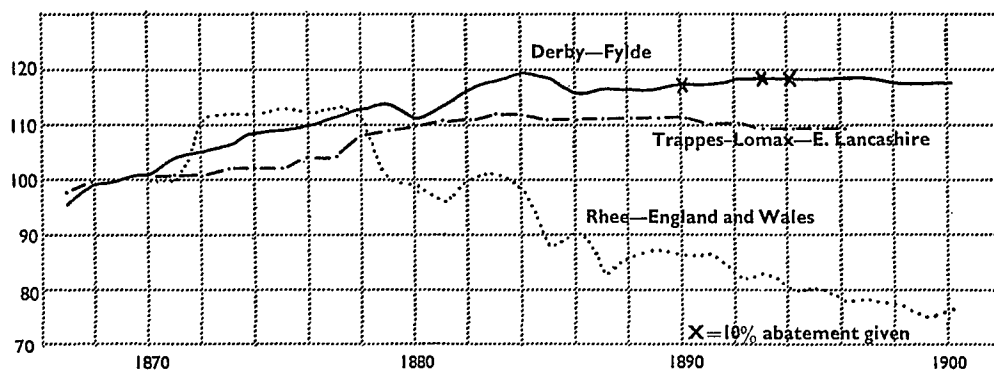
⁴ R.C. 1880-82, Q. 67,505-7 (J. Coleman); cf. R.C. 1894-97, Q. 27,283 (T. Mercer): "Lord Sefton and Lord Derby own all for miles around, so we have confidence, I believe every tenant has, that they will not disturb a tenant."

⁵ *J.R.A.S.*, xxxix, 1877, p. 467.

⁶ *The Rent of Agricultural Land in England & Wales, 1870-1943* (Central Landowners' Association, 1949), Table II, pp. 44-6.

⁷ See, for example, R.C. 1880-82, Coleman's Report, pp. 31-41; *J.R.A.S.*, xlvi, 1886, pp. 146, 165; *P.G.* 29. 10. 1892; Schulze-Gaevernitz, *op. cit.*, p. 174; *Agricultural Gazette*, 17. 10. 1892; R.C. 1894-97, Q. 9,991 (W. Smith), Q. 12,526 (T. Worthington); *ibid.*, C. 7400 of 1894, Appendix A IV, 413, Appendix A. XIII, 429.

C. RENT



Derby, 1867-71=100=£4,634=index of agreed rents from the manor of Trayles, Roseacre, and Quarles.

Trappes-Lomax, 1867-71=100=£3,009=index of agreed and paid rents from 40 identical farms.

Rhee, 1870-1=100=26s. 7d.=index of average agricultural rent per acre in England and Wales.

significance in itself, the rents of the large manor of Trayles were scrutinized. The gross rent increased from £4,452 in 1867 to £5,478 in 1884, from which figure there was little significant change up to 1904. Arrears stood at the formidable figure of £4,996 in 1867, fluctuated downward to £2,870 in 1882, dropped sharply to £745 in 1883, and did not reach four figures again until 1900; in 1904 arrears were £862. Only a small fraction of these arrears were 'carried out', viz., written off as bad; the bulk were eventually paid. Ten per cent abatements were given in 1890, 1893, and 1894.¹

On the Trappes-Lomax estates of Clayton and Allsprings in east Lancashire gross rents from 40 farms rose from £2,942 in 1867 to a maximum of £3,368 in 1883, declined slightly to £3,270 in 1893, and remained at this figure until the end of the rental in 1896. No abatements are mentioned and arrears were negligible throughout, perhaps because almost all these rents were paid in cash, as might be expected in an area of producer-retailers.² On the nearby Thwaites's estate, agreed rents remained at an average of £2 5s. 3d. an acre from 1875 to 1895, remissions of perhaps 15 per cent being granted in 1892 and 1893.³ Immediately over the county boundary on the Lister estate near Halifax rents remained unchanged, after allowing for industrial loss of acreage, between 1870 and 1900.⁴

Evidence of this nature, corroborated by contemporary opinion such as

¹ C.R.O., DDK (Fylde Rents).

² C.R.O., Trappes-Lomax Rentals.

³ R.C. 1894-97, Q. 40,841 (J. Howson); the percentage remitted is not given as such.

⁴ Shibden Hall, Halifax, Lister MSS.

Smith's to the effect that "permanent reductions were very few, they were the exception,"¹ and by comment in the *Preston Guardian* suggesting that a 10 per cent abatement in an occasional year after 1890 was as much as the Lancashire tenant could expect,² is indicative of the firmness of farm rents in Lancashire during the Great Depression. It is extremely doubtful, after all allowance has been made for reduction and remission in the 'nineties, whether by the end of the century rents actually paid had fallen to the level of 1867-71. The Tithe Act of 1891, which enforced the payment of tithe by the landowner by transferring to him the legal responsibility for its payment, appeared to make no change in the tenants' position in Lancashire. Evidence from the Derby and Hesketh (south-west Lancashire) rentals corroborates Thomas Worthington's statement in 1894 that the invariable practice after 1891 was to add the Tithe or Tithe Rent Charge to the rent;³ this has been discounted in the Derby rent series which is net of tithe throughout.

The net income position of the landowner is obscure. Little is known about estate maintenance costs and investment, but such evidence as has been found indicates that at least on some estates the level of investment was maintained,⁴ even though, as was claimed, interest-free improvements were effected by the landlord in lieu of rent reductions.⁵ Any appreciable fall in net income was improbable and an impoverished landowner was unlikely to be found in Lancashire, albeit his property were confined to agricultural land, which was rarely the case.⁶

As evidence of depression within the county rent reductions and abatements in the eighteen-nineties should be treated with caution. The activities of the newly formed Lancashire farmers' associations during a period when

¹ *R.C. 1894-97*, Q. 9,979 (W. Smith); cf. President Rimmer's complaint at the Lancashire Tenant Farmers' meeting that there "had been few reductions in Lancashire rents."—*P.G.* 10. 12. 1892.

² See, e.g., *P.G.* 4. 2. 1893, 7. 10. 1893, 13. 1. 1894, 28. 4. 1894.

³ *R.C. 1894-97*, Q. 12,527-9 (T. Worthington).

⁴ See, for the Thwaites's estate, *R.C. 1894-97*, Q. 40,856 (J. Howson); Sir Charles Tempest, *P.G.* 7. 10. 1893; Trappes-Lomax, C.R.O.; Derby, *P.G.* 25. 9. 1886, 14. 10. 1893; Sefton, *P.G.* 14. 10. 1893; Duchy of Lancaster, *P.G.* 14. 10. 1893, *R.C. 1894-97*, C. 7400 of 1894, Appendix A XIII, p. 429; Crown, *ibid.*, Appendix A IV, p. 413. Land reclamation continued; 500 acres of the Rawstorne property at Hutton and Howick were reclaimed from the marsh in 1887 when the rent was £1 an acre; in 1894 it was £3 10s. and "cheap at the price" (*P.G.* 19. 5. 1894).

⁵ This was alleged by J. Kay, an official of the Lancashire Federation and an ex-tenant of the Thwaites's estate, before the Royal Commission in March 1894 (Q. 14,009) and vehemently denied by the agent Howson in the following February (Q. 40,661).

⁶ *P.G.* 7. 2. 1891: tenants were "forthcoming" and "nothing is heard of landlords being obliged to farm their estates themselves;" *R.C. 1894-97*, Q. 11,313 (A. Wilson Fox): "Land agents say the land has not gone back . . . and that farms will let easily."

agricultural depression was widely assumed to be endemic were inevitably affected by national and political considerations.¹ Lancashire farmers were not protectionists² and local price changes offered only a small target; there remained the landowner, for long the recipient of criticism from urban radicals.

A continuous campaign was mounted by this vociferous minority of organized farmers against the level of rents. It was well publicized by local newspapers whose editors tended to look at agriculture through eyes conditioned by the national press, which in turn reflected the view of the corn-growing interest. Vivid contrasts and "lessons for Lancashire landlords" were drawn between the fall in rents in the eastern counties and their immobility in Lancashire. The challenge was reiterated that "if the price of land did not come down in Lancashire and Cheshire, it would have to do."³ Such a campaign, though conducted by a minority, could not but have some effect on tenants and landlords and their agents as they engaged in their bi-annual commiseration over the dearth of coin in the pockets of each. The relative stability of Lancashire rents under such pressure suggests not only a continuing demand for agricultural land, which may conceivably have been misguided, but the absence of any fundamental depression.⁴

CONCLUSION

The experiences of Lancashire livestock farmers during the Great Depression are graphically illustrated by the movement of their product prices which, unlike Sauerbeck's curve of general prices in terms of which the Great Depression is seen as a period of continuously falling prices from the plateau edge of a Golden Age in 1873-4 to the trough of the mid-nineties,

¹ The main body was the Lancashire Tenant Farmers' Association founded in January 1892; a short account of the origins and development of the various local associations since their effective beginning in 1890 is given in *P.G.* 10. 12. 1892.

² The agricultural correspondent of the *Preston Guardian*, after a tour of the Fylde, "was surprised to find that most of the gentlemen I called upon were staunch Free Traders" (*P.G.* 13. 4. 1895). Lancashire farmers considered that the Great London Agricultural Conference addressed by Chaplin in 1892 was a "profound disappointment in that it was throughout PROTECTIONIST."—*P.G.* 10. 12. 1892.

³ *P.G.* 5. 10. 1895; repeated 3. 10. 1896; attributed to Chaplin, December 1892.

⁴ See the exchange between Giffen and Wilson Fox (*R.C.* 1894-97, Q. 11,313-22), particularly Q. 11,322: "Why should they compete for farms . . . unless it is the case that it pays them to do it in Lancashire?—One would think that would be the case. One is loth to believe them unbusinesslike, and to bid higher than they can pay." Cf. *P.G.* 16. 10. 1897: "So far the number of farms to be let in north Lancashire may be counted on the fingers of one hand, and yet have some to spare, and the small acreage of land that has this year been sold in public sales has made very good prices."

climbed steadily upwards into the early 'eighties to fall back to approximately the 1867-71 level by the 'nineties. With the price of feed roughly following the price of wheat and falling throughout, livestock farmers enjoyed a double incentive to expand output, namely, a fall in production costs and a continually rising demand for their products, most of which enjoyed a degree of protection, derived from transport difficulties and quality differences, against the competition of imports.

At a crude estimate the value of gross output from Lancashire livestock farms increased by a third during the Great Depression. On the other side total labour costs fell by some 15 per cent and rent may be taken as unchanged. If it be assumed that in 1867-71 expenditure on feed equalled the combined cost of labour and rent, then with a fall of a third in the price of feed, the maintenance of total costs in 1894-8 at their earlier level would permit an increase of 60 per cent in the quantity of feed purchased. As total milk output, in all forms, increased by less than 50 per cent, it would seem that such an increase of expenditure on feed was ample for the expansion envisaged. A rise in the value of output with no increase in total costs indicates a larger gross profit margin, to be divided moreover between a smaller number of farmers if Census data are even approximately correct.

Thus considering the evidence of output, prices, the movement of rent, and the lack of concrete evidence of distress during a period when such evidence was specifically requested by successive Royal Commissions, it must be concluded that no great depression of agriculture existed in Lancashire during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. On the contrary, the evidence indicates substantial prosperity until 1884 and the mitigation of any subsequent adverse impact from declining output prices by a relatively steeper fall in feed costs and by an expansion of output.

In explanation of this immunity from distress a number of factors may be cited, all to some extent recognized both by contemporary and post-mortem investigators. They include the keeping of livestock, particularly milk cows, sheep, pigs, and poultry; a reliance on grassland and purchased feed rather than the plough; the existence of small farms largely independent of hired labour; the presence of adjacent urban markets; the practice of direct sale to the consumer; and freedom of the tenant from restrictive covenants.

But these factors were not peculiar to Lancashire. They were to be found in various combinations throughout the country, even in the arable areas. "Looking forward to what was coming," Sir John Lawes reluctantly installed a dairy herd and gave up a "great deal of corn growing" at the beginning of the 'seventies.¹ The earl of Leicester, son of the great Coke, aban-

¹ *R.C. 1880-82*, Q. 57,619 (Sir John Lawes).

doned the four-course, laid down his corn land to grass, and fattened sheep at a profit.¹ Even in East Anglia small farms predominated; in Norfolk, Suffolk, and Essex taken together, almost a half of the total number of agricultural holdings over 5 acres were under 50 acres in size and less than 10 per cent were over 300 acres. By the eighteen-nineties few parts of the country were beyond the reach of either a local market or the ever spreading demand of the conurbations, in particular that of London. Lord Vernon in the midlands, like Mr Miller of Singleton Park in the Fylde, supplied regular customers with fresh butter at a price higher than that in the retail markets.² Lastly, long leases and restrictive covenants were disappearing as opinion turned against them and legislation endeavoured to give formal protection to the annual tenant.

It may be argued that such alternatives were perhaps feasible on the light lands of Hertfordshire and Norfolk but impracticable for heavy land farmers like those on the clays of Essex, acknowledged as the worst hit county. But even in Essex there was scope for initiative.³ The Scottish dairying on the run-down Essex clay may be paralleled by the less publicized experiences of Lancashire men who took with them, besides milking cows, a tradition of freedom, both from technical dogma and restrictive landlords, a keen eye for opportunities and a willingness to farm according to the dictates of the market. As a Fylde farmer observed after touring Essex, "new-comers are going in for milk, cheese, butter, fruit, and sheep, but with the average Essex farmer it is corn, corn, corn." The prices of milk, butter, and cheese were as good as if not better than in Lancashire, thanks to the proximity of London which constituted a "ready and paying market which they cannot flood." "Look at the hay they want in London," the Fylde man expostulated, "the butter, the beef, the milk, to say nothing of the cheese and eggs. But when we were down in Chelmsford we learnt that the town was often short of milk and didn't hear of any farmer who made cheese."⁴

Perhaps the fundamental explanation of Lancashire farmers' prosperity during the depression is not the presence of favourable circumstances—after all these did not appear fortuitously—but the character of the farmers themselves. In the eyes of Essex men, Lancashire farmers were "more

¹ *R.C.* 1894-97, C. 7400-IV, Appendix E, pp. 597-8.

² *R.C.* 1894-97, Q. 21,761, 35,332; *P.G.* 18. 4. 1891.

³ See R. Hunter Pringle's series of articles on the change from corn to meat and grass in Essex during the eighteen-eighties in the *Agricultural Gazette* of 1887, July onwards, esp. 10. 10. 1887.

⁴ *P.G.* 24. 10. 1896: Report of the tour of Essex organized by the *Preston Guardian* for Lancashire farmers; see also September to December inclusive in the same year for accounts of Lancashire emigration to Essex.

boisterous, more energetic in temperament than our people. The same enters into your work, I have noticed. Our folk want to work genteelly; they don't put that energy, that enterprise, that wholehearted zeal into it that you do."¹ Undoubtedly the "mercantile enterprise of Liverpool and Manchester merchants . . . imbued the agriculturalists of the district with the same impetus,"² but the "pregnant wit"³ of the Lancastrian long antedated the Industrial Revolution, however subsequently it may have been sharpened by the economic fluctuations of the nineteenth century which not only closed cotton mills but thereby deprived the milk-selling farmer of all his best customers. But granted these virtues in the Lancashire farmer, it can scarcely be maintained that with the exception of a scattered handful beyond the Lyme he enjoyed a monopoly of vision and enterprise. The question thus arises: to what extent was the period really as tragic as the orthodox picture claims? Have the agonized cries of corn-growers and the simple symbolism of the wheat price continued to hypnotize twentieth-century observers as they did nineteenth-century participants? A study of more relevant evidence than that considered by the Royal Commissions of 1880-2 and 1894-7 and viewed with rather more impartial eyes might suggest a radical reappraisal of the accepted view.⁴

APPENDIX

A. MILK OUTPUT AND CONSUMPTION

Yields per cow in Lancashire are taken to be greater than those assumed by Dr E. M. Ojala for the U.K. (*Agriculture and Economic Progress*, 1952, pp. 204-5) in view of the greater proportion of specialist milk producers in the county. The general pattern of milk consumption estimates between those of J. C. Morton (*J.R.A.S.*, 1865, 1878) and those of A. R. Prest (*Consumers' Expenditure in the U.K. 1900-1919*, 1954) suggests a rise from about $\frac{1}{4}$ pint to $\frac{1}{3}$ pint a head each day. Assuming the more conservative increase of 25 per cent between 1870 and 1894-8 and using *Agricultural Returns* for the number of cows, and Dr Ojala's U.K. estimate of yields, the output of farm butter and cheese in England and Wales appears to have constituted about 45 per cent of total milk production in 1870, falling to 30 per cent in 1894-8 and 23 per cent in 1907 (this latter figure is taken from the *Agricultural Output of Great Britain*,

¹ *Ibid.* ² *J.R.A.S.*, xxxviii, 1877, p. 464.

³ A. A. Mumford, *The Manchester Grammar School, 1515-1915*, 1919, p. 11: in the School Statutes of 1525. Professor Redford kindly drew my attention to this point and provided the reference.

⁴ For example, much evidence furnished to the Commission of 1894-7 received scant attention; see the *Minority Reports* of G. Lambert and F. A. Channing, both of whom complained that the majority ignored examples of successful farming.—*Final Report*, pp. 204-376, C. 8540 of 1897.

1908, Cd 6277 of 1912) but with absolute output changing little. For Lancashire with its many liquid milk sellers a proportion of 30 per cent was assumed for 1870 with absolute output unchanged thereafter.

B. MILK PRICES

(i) Retail. Of 29 Lancashire retail milk quotations covering the Great Depression, 16 give 3d, 5 less than 3d, and 8 over 3d a quart as the ruling price. Prices were higher in the larger towns, reaching 4d at Liverpool, and lower in the more rural areas, but little significant change in the average level of prices occurred until 1909-10 when a general rise to 3½d took place. For sources see *Manchester Guardian* and *Manchester Courier* for February and March 1872, and *Preston Guardian*, 29. 9. 1892.

It appears that a general rise occurred in or about 1872, a time of rising prices, and that some, if not all, of this increase was lost before 1891 when, as in 1900-1 outside the Liverpool and Manchester areas, the commonest price was 3d a quart. As it is doubtful whether all the gain of 1872 was lost by the 'nineties, e.g. the Manchester price was above 3d in 1897 and 1901 and very probably so in 1891, and as moreover it seems that outside the largest centres of population the price rose to 3d *circa* 1872 and never thereafter fell, it follows that the retail price of milk could scarcely have fallen between 1867-71 and 1894-8.

For the purpose of Graph B a price of 3d has been taken for 1867-71 rising to 3½d (in practice 3d in summer and 3½d in winter) in 1872 and falling again to 3d in 1886, the trough year of the trade cycle. In corroboration of the view that the retail price was constant over a long period was the practice before 1910 in east Lancashire of using pint measures permanently marked internally into thirds: at a price of 3d a quart, milk could thus conveniently be sold in pennyworths and halfpennyworths (information from Mr E. Fitton of Bury; cf. also *Preston Guardian*, 25. 1. 1936).

(ii) Wholesale. Price quotations of wholesale milk in Lancashire are scarce.

Date	Source	Comment	Price in pence per gallon		
			Summer	Winter	Average
1871-2	<i>Manchester Courier</i> , 14. 2. 1872	near Manchester	6-6½	7-7½	6¾
1876	<i>J.R.A.S.</i>	near Lancaster	-	-	8
1880-2	<i>R.C.</i>	near Stockport	8	10	9
1886	<i>J.R.A.S.</i>	near Lancaster	-	9	(8)
1894	<i>P.G.</i> , 13. 10. 1894	{Blackpool	10	-	-
		{Fylde	7-8	-	-
1897	<i>J.R.A.S.</i>	a Manchester dealer (so probably refers to Cheshire supplies)	6	7½-9	7½

If, as seems probable, quoted prices are those paid by buyers and nominally received by producers, then the fall in rail transport costs between the 'seventies and the 'nineties of approximately ½d per gallon would offset by that amount any fall in price. The evidence is slender, but such as there is falls into the familiar Lancashire product curve pattern, rising in the 'seventies and falling back in the 'eighties. No Lancashire witness before the Royal Commission of 1894-7 who gave evidence in the years 1894 to 1896 complained of a fall in the price of milk, either wholesale or retail. On the contrary, it was specifically stated by the Assistant Commissioner for the county that the "price of milk had not fallen" (*R.C. 1894-97*, Q. 11,396, A. Wilson Fox; and see *Preston Guardian*, 14. 10. 1893); in the context Wilson Fox was referring to the period since the mid-'eighties. The milk price in Cheshire was said to have fallen by about 10 per cent from 1880 to June 1894 (*R.C. 1894-97*, Q. 26,014, T. Parton). Prices at the former date were significantly higher, perhaps 20 per cent, than ten years earlier,

so that after allowing for cheaper carriage it is difficult to see how any overall net fall could have occurred between 1867-71 and 1894-8. It is just possible that some temporary unrecorded reduction took place in 1895 and (or) 1896 in the trough of the general price cycle.

C. BUTTER AND CHEESE PRICES

(i) Butter. The original series of Lancashire butter prices was taken from the *Wigan Observer* in the absence of any continuous Preston series. It is an annual unweighted average of prices at Wigan market on the first market day of each calendar month throughout the year. The spread of prices on any one day was narrow— $\frac{1}{2}$ d or 1d a lb.; very frequently only one price was quoted. Comparable prices at Ormskirk market were taken from the *Ormskirk Advertiser*; here too the spread was narrow or non-existent. North Cheshire butter and egg prices were published in the *Manchester Guardian* and the *Stockport Advertiser* from 1884-5 onwards. Stockport prices moved conformably with those at Wigan and Ormskirk. Prices at Wigan declined by 15 per cent between 1867-71 and 1894-8; at Ormskirk by only 11 per cent as a result of an advantage that was gained between 1873 and 1876 and never thereafter lost. The Kelsall butter prices, which are an annual average of fifty-two weekly quotations weighted by weekly quantities sold, fit the Ormskirk-Wigan pattern. The average of 1872-77 inclusive = 110 = the average of Wigan prices in the same years; the mean of the 1896 and 1900 prices = 87. It may be tentatively concluded that farm butter prices at Lancashire markets declined by some 13 per cent between 1867-71 and 1894-8.

(ii) Cheese. No unbroken single source of Lancashire farm cheese prices has been found. Some Preston prices were occasionally published in the *Preston Guardian*. The *Manchester Guardian* quoted prices at various markets, including Lancaster, Preston, Crewe, Derby, Nottingham, and Leicester, sporadically throughout the period. The *Agricultural Gazette* gives some Preston and Lancaster prices between 1888 and 1894. The *Wigan Observer* abandoned the reporting of cheese prices at Wigan after 1882. A Staffordshire cheese factory price series, from 1874 to 1893 inclusive, is the most complete annual series discovered but is of limited value in assessing changes in the price of Lancashire farm cheese.

Market prices were usually quoted for two or three grades, variously defined, but this was not universal. The spread of prices in any one year may be considerable, e.g. William Kelsall made 80s. in May 1875 but only 60s. in October, or again at Preston in 1886 April prices ranged from 50s. to 65s. whilst October prices were 70s. to 80s. As between adjacent districts price movements could vary widely; the *Manchester Guardian* (10. 10. 1892) reported of Chester October fair: "As compared with last year there was a downward tendency of 5s. per cwt. for fine and 10s. to 15s. for other qualities," whereas two days later at Lancaster the "prices realised were from 5s. to 10s. per cwt. more than at the last October fair." A further complication is the suggestion of a shift during the Great Depression from late maturing cheeses which were stored on the farm over winter to the quick-ripening cheese consumed in the season of its manufacture (see *Preston Guardian*, 12. 10. 1895).

In these circumstances the best single series, although incomplete, is that of prices each year at Lancaster autumn fair and this has been graphed. William Kelsall's prices in the eighteen-sixties and 'seventies have also been shown. A price curve of inferior qualities has not been drawn but a decline of some 20 per cent is indicated.

D. MUTTON AND LAMB PRICES

Mutton and lamb prices are taken from Salford Tuesday market reports published in the *Manchester Guardian* and the *Manchester Courier*. Salford was the largest market in the county and dealt mainly in native live sheep; the numbers and prices of foreign and Irish sheep were

usually given separately. The aim has been to obtain a price series applicable to Lancashire sheep, almost all of which were sold off grass; the majority were hill or hill-crosses lambled during March, April, and early May (see *Preston Guardian*, 31. 3. 1894). In some years, particularly the later, *Manchester Guardian* reports are sufficiently detailed to provide a seasonal picture of sources of supply. The best representation of Lancashire prices is obtained by averaging weekly prices during July to October inclusive. Prior to July few Lancashire lambs were marketed, and there is, moreover, the difficulty of distinguishing shorn sheep from those "in the wool;" after October numbers at the market fall off rapidly.

Prices were quoted in pence per pound except occasionally when lambs were quoted per head. Graph B is the mean of two price series, one for lamb and the other for mutton, excluding imported sheep but including ewes. A typical October report reads (*Manchester Guardian*, 3. 10. 1894): "good Cheviot wethers and well finished North Country lambs 8½, strong North Country sheep 7¾-8, Cheviot and Half-Bred ewes 6¼-6½, 1st class Irish wethers 7¾, heavy ditto 6¾-7¼, ewes 6; (number at market 10,376)."

Letter to the Editor

HITTING SHEEP ON THE NOSE

SIR,—As a boy in 1941 I watched sheep being dipped at Buckden in Upper Wharfedale, Yorkshire, and was intrigued to see the shepherd give each one a sharp knock at the base of the snout with a stone. This observation remained in my memory without explanation until I began to work with sheep at the Wool Industries Research Association ten years later. A colleague there said that he had observed this custom in Nidderdale, Yorkshire, about 1953, and had been given the explanation by those who carried it out, that young sheep were hit in this way in order to prevent a bone in the skull from developing at the expense of the rest of the body. A young sheep farmer of Bell Busk, near Malham, Yorkshire, told me in 1956 that he had carried out this practice, and gave a similar explanation, but said that he no longer agreed with it.

Mr K. J. Towers, senior lecturer in veterinary science at Leeds University, told me that he was familiar with the custom, which in fact breaks the outer plate of the frontal bone, but he considered that there was no basis for the belief that this would allow better growth of the body. Such primitive customs

often do have a basis, and Mr T. Mason of Reynard Ing, Ilkley, also familiar with the practice, gave me the interesting suggestion that damage of the frontal region might stimulate growth by causing an increased secretion of pituitary growth hormone. There is no evidence that this could happen, but a stress mechanism involving hormone secretions is triggered-off by bone fracture, and this could conceivably influence the metabolic state of the animal.

I write, however, to put this almost extinct custom on record, and also to inquire whether others have seen it in other parts of Britain, or seen references to it in old agricultural works. Associate Professor J. V. Evans of this Faculty met a farmer in Cumberland who spoke of this custom and explained that it was to remove bot from the nasal passages, as well as to prevent attack from this parasite, the larva of *Oestrus ovis*. The books, such as Youatt (1837), with which I am familiar make no mention of the practice, although Youatt gives detailed descriptions of various methods for the removal of bot by wire and other instruments.

(continued on page 54)